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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

THE PURPOSE OF PLAY

The uses of athletics are many — good, bad, and indifferent. Some people earn their living by playing ball or turning somersaults. Others, with highly developed acquisitive traits, capitalize the physical prowess of men as a method of enriching themselves. Even the colleges do it.

Athletics in mild form contribute to health, and in gentler diversions recreation is furnished. To those who lead a sedentary life physical exercise provides a wholesome safety valve for energy.

Students of social psychology declare that athletic contests satisfy the instinct for combat. The bootless pastime of abusing the umpire may have tended to keep America out of war! Team play combines the development of leadership with useful training in coöperation.

Sportsmanship — including fair play, friendly rivalry, fortitude in the face of defeat, and gracious acceptance of victory — is perhaps as important a purpose as any.

In America amateur athletics are largely confined to the schools. Paradoxical as it may seem, the opportunity for play is often responsible for keeping boys at their lessons, while in college the eligibility requirement induces many a man to study when the efforts of the most inspiring instructor would fail. Strangely enough it is by the standard of athletic

achievement that the American youth frequently selects the college where he will study mathematics, language, or law.

Athletics furnish the most potent influence in arousing the spirit of loyalty and unity that characterizes college life. Lest alumni lose that spirit they are annually enticed to a homecoming — by a football game.

For the hundreds of thousands who have filled the Coliseum, Stadium, or Bowl, who have shivered or roasted on hard plank seats, devoured peanuts, smoked tobacco, and howled at the athletes, physical exploits have always possessed peculiar fascination. The populace wants to be thrilled — and it matters but little apparently whether the spectacle is a bull fight or a ball game. The perversion of college athletics into commercial exploitation is a travesty on games played for fun.

There are people who see competitive sport chiefly as an opportunity for gambling. Always demoralizing, betting has sometimes been the cause of criminal offenses against the contestants — as when the Iowa football team was poisoned just before the final game in 1900.

Perhaps the most innocent amusement that public sports afford to lookers-on is an occasion for courtship, though it would seem that only the most sanguine would choose such a time and such a place for such a purpose.

J. E. B.